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PARIS FOR WALLER; LONDON FOR TSOU

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TAGS: PREL SY LE

SUBJECT: CHARGE URGES SARG TO PRESS HIZBALLAH FOR RELEASE OF HOSTAGES, RESTRAINT

REF: STATE 114594

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen A. Seche, per 1.4 b,d.

¶1. (C) Charge expressed the deep concern of the USG about the current regional crisis and Syria's role in it to his designated interlocutor at the MFA, Director of Protocol Amir Smadi. Meeting the morning of July 13, Charge urged the SARG in the strongest terms to exercise its influence on Hizballah to press for the release of the two IDF soldiers taken hostage yesterday, to exercise restraint, and to stop the irresponsible shelling of northern Israel. Charge warned that although Syria may feel that it can avoid being drawn into the current crisis, this was not the case, given the SARG's special relationship with Hizballah. The SARG needed to play a positive role in helping to resolve the crisis and preventing it from escalating, insisted the Charge.

¶2. (C) The Charge also urged the SARG to exercise its influence with Hamas to have the Israeli hostage in Gaza released. On a related note, Charge mentioned reftel points and urged the SARG to press Qatar to delay seeking a vote on its draft UNSC resolution.

¶3. (C) Smadi responded that the SARG is "taking all measures" to contain the situation. When asked by the Charge what those measures included, Smadi merely noted that the SARG is making contact with a range of parties to avoid further escalation. Smadi added that Egyptian FM Aboul Gheit had visited Damascus the evening of July 12, spending about three hours in meetings with President Asad and FM Mu'allim. Smadi asked for the Charge's assessment of where the situation was headed and expressed concern that Israel might feel trapped and sense that there were no restraints on its retaliatory response.

¶4. (C) The Charge responded that he could not speak to Israeli intentions, reiterating that the USG believes Syria is implicated in the current crisis and needed to use its influence to help resolve it.

¶5. (C) Comment: Upon entering and departing MFA, Charge noted the arrival of several COM's intent on demarching the SARG on the need to help resolve the deepening crisis. Other diplomatic contacts informed us that their ambassadors would be doing likewise today. While the SARG is likely to feel great satisfaction with what it will view as a fresh diplomatic reminder of Syria's centrality in resolving such Middle East crises, it is unlikely -- for now -- to provide more than perfunctory assurances of its good will and intentions to help resolve the crisis.

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